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Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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A MOTHER'S DIARY.

CONTRIBUTED BY MISS BEALE.

THERE has been placed in my hands by a member of our staff three little MS. volumes of more than a hundred pages each, written in the close compact hand of an earlier generation. The first volume contains a record of observations made during the infancy of her little son by the mother; it is dated nearly 50 years ago.

It is touching to read the prayer with which it opens:—

"Grant, O Lord, that this undertaking may be to Thy glory! that I may have wisdom to see and gently but firmly reprove and correct my child's faults. . . . Oh Thou, who art the *Truth*, guide my mind and pen in all I may be led to remark and note down here regarding my dear boy. . . . Vouchsafe a blessing on the *commencement* of this work, and so order things that the *result* of it should be to the good of the child, his parents, and his future associates, and bring glory to Thy name."

Mrs. X. prefaces the work by a quotation from Mdme. Necker de Saussure:—"I would earnestly exhort all young mothers to keep a journal in which the gradual progress and unfolding of their children's minds may be noted down. Even if they have no general views in so doing, they will derive much benefit from it; their ideas will become more collected, their plans more determined, and they will acquire a habit of thoroughly examining and endeavouring to understand whatever occurs to excite their attention. . . . I would have it a true journal, in which an account should be kept of every successive step made by the child; where every vicissitude in its health, whether mental or physical, should be registered, and where the *measure* of the child, in every meaning of the word, as taken at different periods of his age, should be noted down. Words, ideas, knowledge, feelings—everything in short which is either naturally unfolded in the

mind, or acquired by education, should be here recorded; together with the first appearance of every endowment, and every defect, the original source of which would thus be open to our consideration. And as we cannot describe a child without relating his history, such a journal would be enlivened by the little incidents of each day, and the joys and sorrows peculiar to his age; nor would it be long before the task of keeping it would become to the mother the most interesting of employments."

Mrs. X. was the wife of an Indian missionary, and though after a time, owing to ill-health, the journal is not kept with the same fulness as at first, yet the child's history is sketched up to the age of twelve.

We think a few extracts may interest our readers and set an example which may be profitable to some. The interesting observations of Mdme. Necker de Saussure furnished the philosopher Rosmini with the facts on which he has founded psychological theories, and are full of interest to the student of child-life.

"Our dear child was born on July 19th, 1846, at Calcutta. He has a fresh rosy complexion, with an interesting though not pretty face. At three days old he first evinced anger. . . . At a fortnight old he *seemed* to know his nurse's voice, for on her return home after some hours' absence he turned his head towards the direction in which she spoke. . . . Before he was a month old he smiled as I thought, and decidedly, when about six weeks old. He cooed and talked a little before he was two months old. At this age also he used to enjoy a game at bo-peep. . . . When within a few days of three months old I held him to a mirror, and he smiled happily at his own reflection. The day he was three months old we started for Midnapore. He was very happy . . . sleeping well at night, and when awake forcing himself up into a sitting posture to look out on the scenery through which we passed so rapidly, and which he *silently* observed for long intervals. This surprised me in an infant so young, I having no idea they were so observant, or able to fix their attention so long. He remained at Midnapore 34 days, and improved much in intelligence. He there first *laughed* merrily, a kind of happy chuckle; progressed much in talking *loudly*, and also shewed symptoms of decided anger

by a shrill scream occasionally. He here used to evince his love of fun, hiding his face suddenly in his ayah's shoulder. His father was absent from Midnapore from November 5th to 12th, and on his return baby looked at him with bewilderment and scrutiny, and then smiled sweetly in manifest recognition, and for several days seemed peculiarly happy in playing with and watching his father, turning quickly round at the sound of his voice, smiling brightly on seeing him, and crying after him when he left. When just four months old, his favorite attendant left Midnapore to precede us on our return. At the evening hour, when she always took him from me . . . he seemed to miss her and cried quite hysterically as if his heart would break, in a manner quite different from what we had before witnessed. At four months he began to use his hands more *decidedly*, occasionally holding his toys and putting out his arms to come to me or the ayah. He then also seemed suddenly to have progressed in observation of a minute or close kind, admiring some coloured dresses much, and in a fortnight later he took part of his ayah's dress, and at another time mine, in his little hand and stroked it and drew it to him to look at more closely. . . . Dec. 12th.—He began a new kind of talk, changing his usual loud exclamations from the throat for a more articulate sound proceeding from the lips and tongue, as 'Dadda,' 'Uth-tha.' About Christmas Day he began another kind of talk, being a very soft, melodious sound, in which only the vowels seemed to be used, as 'ah-ah,' 'oh-oh,' 'ou,' 'oy-oh'—the emphasis being thrown on the second sound.

"To-day he woke up too early . . . after being very fractious he grew quite passionate and nothing would please him. At length he grew so violent that I threw cold water in his face, which before had always checked a fit of crying; but this time he seemed to try and brave it, and to cry the louder. I then ventured on giving him a *pat*, as I thought him really naughty. His distress now became very great, the cry becoming quite hysterical, and he struggled to leave me, and I let the dhye take him; but on wishing to take him myself again soon after, he turned away from me. This I felt deeply, and even more so his resuming his bitter cry on my taking him into my arms. I so feared I had punished

him prematurely, *i.e.*, before he could attach any idea but unkindness to my conduct. . . . Jan. 11th.—To-day he crawled a little. 13th.—To-day he decidedly crawls, drawing up his knees, and then pushing himself forward; but he still finds it difficult, and after a few attempts gets fractious. He is generally very cautious, but I have seen him once fall on his face, and twice roll over from his stomach on his back, giving his head a smart rap, but he only looked astonished and did not cry. . . . 11th and 12th.—To-day he wished for the nail-scissors, which he strove to take from my hand. I, of course, withdrew them, when he cried for them. He also seized a porcelain cover from a box the dhye was holding, and on her gently taking it he suddenly seized it again and resisted its being taken away. This is the first time he has shewn this spirit, or even the intelligence thus to prefer one thing above another."

(Then follows a detailed record of "Physical Changes from Birth to Six Months," and of daily habits, hours, &c.)

"Jan. 19th.—Baby is to-day six months old . . . (after vaccination). Jan. 22nd.—This night he had a great cry, when he began as usual to be fretful as we endeavoured to lull him to rest. At length he grew so passionate that I laid him on the floor and walked away. He cried hard at first, but soon more gently, and on my taking him up again stopped crying. On again beginning to do so I put him down with the same result. This showed me he understood quite why he was put down, and also the consciousness that if he was quiet he would be taken up. . . . (After a cold) Soon after the doctor called and found him so much better that he prescribed nothing. In his arms he was very silent, but quite taken up with examining his face. I have omitted to mention this trait in our dear boy. From three months old he has always scrutinized strange faces, and, after a good gaze, either looks quite satisfied or the reverse—in two instances he cried after such an examination. Feb. 8th.—On morning of the 3rd, when kept in bed for his cold, and his toys brought to amuse him, I was interested to see that he held some of his toys, looked at them, and put them to his mouth, but on receiving his rattle he immediately shook it to make a noise, and on his soft ball being given him he tried

to throw it—thus showing he not only distinguished between the *forms*, but also the *uses* of his playthings.

"On the 5th Feb., I think it was, that I was dressing him early in our bed when he started up from my lap and stood on his feet! I was so surprised that I called his papa to see him, who came from the next room and found him still standing erect. . . . One day last week his aunt called me to see him playing with a sunbeam, which came through the venetian and formed a bright spot on the floor. It was a pretty sight to see him thus delighted with one of Nature's beautiful toys, or, in truer language, with God's beautiful workmanship. He lay on the floor and stroked the bright beam, as if to catch it, and then, in his eagerness, he bent his head forward and overshadowed the spot and so lost his toy; again he withdrew his head in surprise, and the magic plaything re-appeared.

"Feb. 23rd.—I feel sure during the last month of what I had before doubted, viz., that he knows his own name to be 'Baby,' and turns round when called. He also knows, I believe, who are coming when 'Papa,' 'Mama,' 'Dhye,' 'Lumber Bearer' are called to. The latter is a great favourite and always greeted with delight. His papa he seems increasingly fond of, and when once he is in his arms it is hard to get rid of him—he clings to him and frets, and sometimes even cries at being given to a servant. I, too, I joy to see, am loved better than any being but his father, and if I pass through the room he always wishes to come to me and looks wistfully after me, so that I find it hard not to stop and play with him. Another thing I have remarked that whenever he is in great distress he says, 'Mum-mum-ma,' and lately I cannot but believe this sound is meant for my name . . . when fractious, he says repeatedly, 'Nay, nay.'

"March 10th.—Again a long interval . . . At the close of February he began decidedly *to sit upright* alone on the floor, and does so now constantly. He has also lately commenced a very pretty habit . . . On seeing his papa enter the room he travels rapidly towards him on his hands and feet, and, on getting near him, puts up one hand, which being received by his papa, he offers the other and is then in a kneeling position, from which he rises by pressing on his father's hands and lifting himself into a standing posture . . .

During the last few days he has had a cold and is become quite pale; his two upper front teeth seem nearly through and he is slightly feverish and prone to be fractious. Amid these troubles he has been obliged to resign his favourite bearer to the house duties, and to submit to the presence and attentions of his awkward and strange successor. Dear baby does not like him, and the first morning cried at being left with him . . . now he frets against it, but tries to put up with the disagreeable change amiably. This fact shows his good disposition, chiefly because he is under the trial of teething, when all children are irritable—and he is inclined to be so too; and it is painful to see him restless and uneasy instead of happy as the day is long.

"I see the dear child's *affections* are developing much, indicated by his unbounded glee at seeing his papa, and by a gentle kind of kiss to me when I have yielded to his wish of taking him in my arms.

"March 19th.—Is to-day eight months old. He now understands fully that when we point to an object he is to look in the direction . . . evidently knows meaning of 'chirza,' and when he hears it looks towards the window or sky for a bird. He now always likes to stand up at the carriage window and look out as we drive along.

"April 19th.—Our dear child is nine months old . . . is well and cheerful. He has to-day been drivelling much, but not one tooth yet. . . . Nearly a month ago he began a new sound to express joy, resembling a prolonged hiccough. About a fortnight ago this was exchanged for a shriller note, very like the tones of a bird . . . so sweet and clear and oft repeated . . . in token of disapprobation a short, shrill, yet suppressed scream—very expressive of impatience. He also has learned to throw away toys when in a pet, which is a bit of mental development which grieves me.

"April 25th.—This morning baby made his first attempts at walking; he was standing by the sofa, and held it while he took a few steps alongside of it. He is getting very bold in standing alone, and has had a few gentle falls in consequence, but generally he is amusingly cautious, and takes great care to balance himself. . . . He is learning now to comprehend a firm denial from us, and readily yields a point when he sees it is not our intention to gratify it. . . . He is very observant

if he sees me angry, and looks surprised and watches me scrutinizingly. . . . He used to remark a loud voice or stern look when quite an infant of about three months old.

"May 8th.—He cut his first tooth.

"May 11th.—The second was cut on the 10th. The left one on the upper jaw in front was first visible, and then the next one to it.

"Yesterday he was in high spirits playing with his papa when the time for his evening wash came, and he was given over to me. At this loss of his play he was much hurt and resisted coming to me. . . . He cried determinedly and passionately; when his papa tried to soothe him he cried on, so I gave him two or three smart pats. He shewed he felt them, but cried still in an angry manner. I then laid him on the floor, but too soon took him up again, for he resumed his naughty cry. I then replaced him on the floor and beckoned the servants away. He cried on, but looked towards us and seemed relenting, so I returned to him and asked if he would be good, and he extended his arms towards me and became quiet; he was well behaved throughout his dressing and after it kissed me three times, thus shewing he bore me no ill-will for my strict discipline. . . . I grieve to see that he is lately *oftener angry*, and at times fickle in his temper and wants. I must attribute this chiefly to the trials of teething, (and the rash has come out again the last two days); yet I feel sure we ought not to let him get into the *habit* of fretting or crying, or being often angry because he is physically tired; for, of course, his evil temper will gain strength and be more difficult to cope with when he grows older.

"Yesterday I had the hardest battle we have yet fought. . . . He was fractious, and on being put on his chair he tried to come back to me, and on my keeping him on it, he threw himself back in a rage. I immediately patted his legs rather severely, which he shewed he felt, but cried on and more violently. I repeated it, looking grave, and speaking to him in a serious voice. He, however, was so violent that I thought it best to remove him gently from the chair and lay him on the floor, when he grew less angry and at length came to me quite subdued, and clung to me so fondly that an attempt to leave him made him unhappy; so after interesting him in other things I withdrew gently.

"June 10th.—He cut his first front lower tooth, just one month since last upper one came through. . . .

"An instance of intelligence and docility which chiefly pleased me was that he picked up a rose leaf, which he held towards his mouth, shook his head, and then threw it away, all the while fixing his dear eyes on me in a very, very expressive manner. I quite understood his silent language; for lately he has had several reprimands and gentle pats on the hands for picking up leaves, crumbs, &c., from the floor, and putting them into his mouth, and he must have meant to tell me, 'I do not mean to eat this, I mean to throw it away.' This seems the first act of moral principle I have seen him capable of. . . . and I hope he will early learn to obey and strive to do what is right.

"July 19th.—He is one year old."